

April 14, 2005 – Remarks on Bankruptcy Bill

The rule we are debating, that we have made today is a closed rule which means that the Members of Congress who brought 35 amendments to the Committee on Rules will not have a chance to bring them up.

This closed rule means that the elected representatives of the people will never have the opportunity to consider the amendments and decide for themselves whether or not they would make the bankruptcy bill a better piece of legislation.

I personally think that amendments protecting our men and women returning from military service in Iraq and Afghanistan would be a good idea, and I feel very strongly that the amendment protecting the victims of identity theft from bankruptcy is an important measure that should be debated on the House floor. After all, Americans are and should be very concerned about identity theft. AARP said it is one of the top five issues concerning seniors today.

Just to give my colleagues an idea of how concerned our fellow Americans should be about this, Lexis-Nexis and GM MasterCard are both recovering from wide-scale security breaches which may have placed millions of

Americans at risk of having their identity stolen. In fact, just 2 days ago, Lexis-Nexis identified more than 300,000 Americans that their personal information may have been stolen. In some cases, it will take those people 6 years to get back their identity. It is a very real problem for our country.

But if my colleagues in the majority do not agree that protecting Americans from identity theft is an important issue, why will they not let the body debate it? If they want to, they can always vote against it. That is the way things are supposed to happen here in a democracy. Instead, they have instituted another closed rule and will not allow us to debate the issues.

This is the fifth Congress that we have debated bankruptcy reform, and we have heard that this morning. To be fair, we have not debated this bill under open rules in the past, but we have certainly debated them under rules that allowed amendments.

This chart shows the number of amendments that the Committee on Rules made in order on this bill in every Congress since the 105th, and I insert in the RECORD at this point a list of the rules.

Number of Amendments Made in Order on Bankruptcy Bills (105th-109th Congress)

105th Congress

H. Res. 452

12 amendments made in order.

106th Congress

H. Res. 158

11 amendments made in order.

107th Congress

H. Res. 71

06 amendments made in order.

108th Congress

H. Res. 147

05 amendments made in order.

109th Congress

H. Res. 211

Closed Rule - No amendments made in order.

This chart shows a disturbing pattern, Mr. Speaker, a pattern that has become common practice here in the House.

In every Congress, Republican leaders have allowed fewer and fewer amendments to be debated. We started at 12 amendments in the 105th Congress; and in the 109th Congress, we have a completely closed rule. Zero amendments are in order. There is less and less democracy in this House, and every Congress fewer voices are being heard on the floor.

The Democrats on the Committee on Rules last month issued a report studying the disturbing trend toward less democracy and deliberation in this House. During this last Congress and this closed rule today convinces me we are only getting worse.

So, Mr. Speaker, I say again we have disallowed the amendments that would have let us make this a better bill, a bill that would protect more vulnerable people in this country, including our soldiers who have returned from Iraq, most of those in the National Guard and Reserves, many of whom are losing their houses because they were called back time and again and were to able to maintain their houses. It is a disgrace we were not allowed to bring that amendment to the floor.